

# PREPARING WOOL FOR MARKET



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# Preparing Wool For Market

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Preparation of wool for market is a phase of sheep production often neglected by ranchmen. They may excel in all other phases of ranching but fail to prepare their clip attractively.

Proper preparation of wool for market is important to the warehouseman because his job is to sell the product. Generally, the more attractive and well prepared clips sell first. Small, poorly prepared clips usually require grading and repacking before they can be sold. Use more care in the preparation of smaller clips because frequently the volume of larger clips helps sell them.

## BREEDING PROGRAM

Preparing wool for market begins with the breeding program. A sheep cannot exceed its inherited ability to produce wool, even with superior feed and management. Select sheep for the most popular kind of wool and strive to obtain uniformity of fineness and length. This is achieved best through a selective breeding program.

## MANAGEMENT

Management of the flock affects the quantity and quality of the clip. Adequate nutri-

tion and good management are necessary for the sheep to reach its maximum wool production. The fleece quickly shows results of poor nutrition by finer fiber that lacks strength. Infestations of internal and external parasites result in lower quality wool.

When the sheep has been bred for good wool production, provided with an adequate feed supply, and given good management, it will produce a fleece equal to its inherited ability to produce wool under those conditions.

Excessive vegetable defects such as burs and needlegrass seeds reduce the value of clips. Such problems can be minimized through pasture rotation and the use of supplemental and temporary pastures. Noxious weeds such as horehound and cockleburs can be controlled by spraying or other measures.

Labor constantly is becoming a more serious problem. To make more efficient use of labor, ranchmen are shearing sheep and goats at the same time. This means one less roundup to the rancher, and one less move for the shearing crew.

When shearing sheep and goats at the same time, shear sheep first. A little mohair in the wool is more undesirable than a little wool in the mohair. It is easier to remove stray

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*Fig. 1. A shearing floor kept clean by the sweeper is essential to a well prepared clip. The trip board on the outer edge of the shearing floor keeps out most of the dirt and helps the shearer throw the sheep.*

wool fibers from the shearing area than it is to remove stray mohair fibers.

Ranchmen are responsible for separating sheep with coarse fleeces and sheep with black fibers so they can be sheared separately. Wool containing black fibers cannot be used in manufacturing white or pastel colored fabrics. Generally, wool containing black fibers has a lower value.

*Tagging* improves the appearance of the wool clip. It consists of removing the tags and dung locks from the rear parts and between the hind legs of the animals 2 months before lambing. This practice keeps the fleece cleaner at lambing time and makes nursing easier for the baby lamb.

Picking cockleburrs off sheep before shearing improves the appearance and value of the wool. The cost of labor and the current wool price determine whether this practice is profitable.

Phenothiazine in urine from recently drenched sheep will stain wool. When sheep need drenching within 45 days of shearing, use a drench other than phenothiazine.

Branding fluid also is detrimental to wool quality, and buyers report that no branding fluid is completely scourable. Ranchmen should identify their sheep by other methods and avoid using branding fluid.

## PENS AND SHEARING FLOORS

Ranchmen should provide a good clean place to shear. Sprinkle catch pens immediately around the shearing floor several times a day to control dust.

Some ranchmen provide concrete shearing floors. These floors are hard on shearing heads, and the shearers tire more quickly. A portable shearing floor constructed of plywood on a frame of 2" x 2" wood strips is more practical.

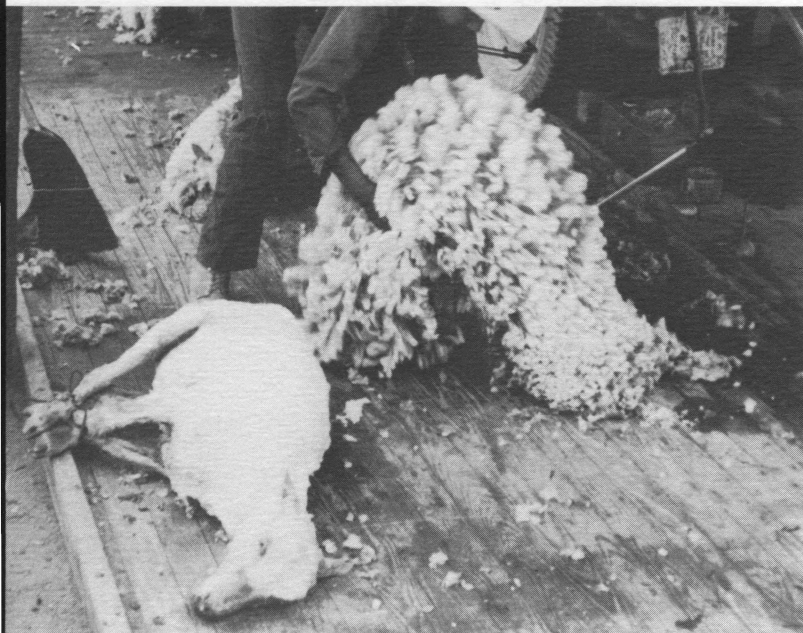
Shearing floors should have a *trip board* to assist the shearer in throwing the animal and also prevent dirt from being dragged onto the shearing floor. It is usually a 2" x 2" strip nailed atop the outside edge of the shearing floor, or a 2-inch protruding pipe embedded in the outside edge of the concrete floor. See figure 1.

## SHEARER

The shearing method is not important if the shearer does a good job. Be careful to take the fleece off in one piece. It is easier to roll a fleece and make it attractive if it is in one piece.

*Second cuts* are made when the shearer fails to keep the shearing head down on the skin the first time, and goes over the same part again. Avoid second cuts because they





*Fig. 2. The "pick-up" boy starts rolling the fleece before the shearer is finished.*

may reduce the grade and value of the wool by reducing the average length.

Instruct the shearer not to step on the fleece and to avoid using too much lubricating oil. Use new oil because burned lubricating oil, which many shearers use, is a difficult impurity to scour out of wool.

Do not cut or injure the sheep, and do not apply too much weight on the belly of a sheep, especially when it has a good fill.

### **SWEEPER**

The sweeper should keep the shearing floor clean. He sweeps the droppings and dirt off the shearing floor and keeps the tags swept up and bagged. This makes a great difference in the appearance of the fleece.

### **FLEECE PICKER**

Roll fleece with the flesh side out. The fleece picker should begin at the neck and fold the belly and back wool under, rolling it toward himself. When the fleece is rolled in this manner, the britch wool will come up last and permit the removal of tags or coarse portions. If the fleece has been rolled properly, the side wool, which represents the largest part of the fleece, will be exposed to the buyer for examination. This rolling method permits

the fleece picker to begin rolling the fleece before the shearer has finished. See figure 2.

### **TIER**

The fleece then goes to the tier. Tie the twine from corner to corner, crossing and then including the other corners. Heavy greasy fleeces tend to become soggy when tied too tightly. Wool buyers call these fleeces "slugs." When many show up in a clip, the shrinkage is raised proportionately.

Use regular paper fleece twine to tie fleeces. Do not use sisal, binder twine or any twine made of vegetable material because vegetable fibers will be shed into the wool.

Do not pack 12-month wool fleeces untied without discussing this with your warehouseman.

### **PACKING**

In Texas, wool is packed in 6-foot bags. A 6½-foot bag is used in northwestern states.

The tier hands fleeces to the packer or "tromper" who packs them. The packer first places a small handful of wool in each of the bottom corners and ties them off. These "ears" should be large enough to provide a good hold when handling the bag.

The flat packed bag is popular in Texas. Place a fleece in each corner of the bag and



tromp only along the seams. Pack fleeces in the bag firmly but not too tightly. When bags are packed too tightly, fleeces lose some of their brightness and many are torn. See figure 3.

The flat packed bag is easy to stack and the stack has less danger of slipping. Such bags are easily and attractively displayed. See figure 4.

In packing a round bag, work the fleeces down in layers of three or four. It is more difficult to produce an attractive bag of wool by this method but more can be packed in each bag. Fleeces usually will be torn more by tromping in this method.

Buyers are interested in bag weights of the clip and say this helps them estimate wool yields. Packers should strive to pack the bags uniformly, not getting them too heavy. Most warehousemen prefer bag weights of 150-165 pounds. Average bag weights will vary among areas because of wool yields.

The so-called "limber" bag of wool is difficult to handle because it has not been firmly packed and will bend or fold.

Lower the fully packed bag of wool onto some boards or a clean floor and sew it. Sew

ears onto the top of the bag to facilitate handling. The bag should not touch the ground after it is removed from the sacking frame. When a bag is rolled along the ground, the wool picks up a coating of dirt that damages its appearance when opened.

Store wool in a dry, clean place. Excessive moisture is harmful because staining and mildew often occur.

Sweep out and clean trucks or freight cars before loading wool. When wool is hauled on open trucks, cover it with a tarpaulin to keep out dust and moisture.

### PREPARING SHORT WOOL CLIPS

About 20 percent of Texas wool clip is sheared twice each year. These usually are divided into 4 and 8-month clips. Very little is ever said about preparing these wools for market, yet good preparation is just as important in these clips as in the 12-month clips.

The same principles of breeding and managing long wools also apply to production of good short wool clips.

Be sure sheep are dry before they are shorn. Before shearing, separate blackfaced or blackface crossbred sheep from white faced

*Fig. 3. These firmly packed "flat" bags are easily handled and fleeces are in better condition when opened. Notice the panels that keep the bags off the ground.*



ones, and coarser wooled sheep from fine-wooled ones.

Paint is a serious contaminant in short wools. Buyers of felting type wools pay a premium for paint free clips, so identify your sheep without using branding paint.

Some 8-month wool clips are long enough to be tied. Discuss this with the warehouseman.

Rolling 8-month fleeces preserves the identity of individual fleeces and permits the wool

packer to do a better job. Since buyers are influenced by their first impression of a clip, prepare the clip attractively.

Buyers of felting type wools will not buy wool packed in plastic bags. Hooks and fork-lifts shatter the plastic, which appears in the finished fabric after manufacturing.

Follow these points in preparing your clip for market, and the warehouseman will not find it difficult to market the wool. He will have a better opportunity to get its true value.

*Fig. 4. The flat packed bag on the left and the round packed bag on the right are opened for display in the warehouse.*



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